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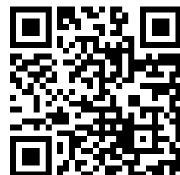

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AN ESSAY ON THE BEL CANTO

BY HERMAN KLEIN

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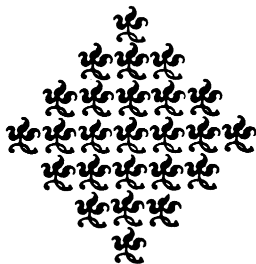
Oxford Musical Essays

THE BEL CANTO

With particular reference
to the singing of Mozart

By HERMAN KLEIN



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PREFACE

THERE are solid reasons why the art of the 'Bel Canto' should be associated in a particular degree with the name of Mozart. His vocal compositions demanded singers of the highest order, and the supreme technical excellence displayed by his chosen interpreters is generally conceded. It is doubtful, indeed, whether the 'beautiful singing' of the Mozart period has since been equalled; certainly it has never been surpassed. Hence the importance of preserving faithfully every feature and rule of the tradition which comes down to us from that period.

A record that may serve as a trustworthy guide in this matter seems to be especially called for at the present time, when the hold upon the true traditions of the 'Bel Canto' is no longer so firm as it was, and when, as it happens, the appetite for Mozart is growing keener every day. The demand to hear Mozart's operas is one of the few bright spots upon the horizon at a critical moment in the history of our lyric stage. Nothing, therefore, should be left undone that can help to renew and maintain the lofty standard of past performances.

Much of the material of this book was put together for a lecture which I gave at the Wigmore Hall last March under the title of 'How to Sing Mozart'.

H. K.

LONDON, 1923.

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TO THAT GENUINE MOZART-LOVER

SIR THOMAS BEECHAM, BT.

WITH ADMIRATION AND ESTEEM.

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I

THE MOZART REVIVAL

It must have been in the late 80's, or perhaps very early 90's, of the past century when I began to notice in an unexpected quarter an attempt to revive interest in the operas of Mozart. The movement started at Munich, of all places; and its chief instigator was a man then regarded as a leading apostle of the 'Music of the Future'—Richard Strauss.

How far the movement was altruistic I was never quite sure. It could not have been intended merely to rescue the masterpieces of Mozart from undeserved neglect, because they had never actually been neglected. Nevertheless, it was true that their popularity had declined. They had only shared the fate of several other favourite operas of the old repertory that had been gradually shifting into the background to make room for the more exciting works of Richard Wagner.

It is more probable that the inauguration of Mozart-cycles at the Munich Opera-house, to follow upon the close of the summer Bayreuth Festivals, owed its origin to a clever business policy. Rich musical tourists from all parts of the world were on the spot with nothing to do, after hearing *Parsifal* and *The Ring*, but to 'take a cure' or go and listen to more music. The main thing was to furnish a contrast. If not Carlsbad or Marienbad (or even with them to follow), why not go to Munich for a couple of weeks just to take in, as a 'corrective', some of the simple but beautiful operas of Mozart? Already Strauss had attracted attention with his admirable revivals—well staged, well sung, carefully rehearsed—during the seasons when he was chief conductor there. It did not take long to organize a cycle and advertise it with Teutonic thoroughness on both sides of the Atlantic.

The success of the scheme was instantaneous. The Bayreuth pilgrims—British, French, American, Russian, Italian—in fact,

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holiday-seeking Continental amateurs generally, not to speak of the music-loving German tourists themselves—flocked in thousands to these performances. They revelled in every moment of them. The older generation renewed and freshened their love for Mozart; the younger conceived a novel and pleasant liking for him. Gradually but surely the taste began to spread in other centres besides Munich, to other examples of the master's genius besides his operas. Before the end of the century it was evident that a big Mozart revival had come to stay.

It has stayed until now. The desire for Mozart pervades our musical life, no longer as a desire, but as a necessity. It is founded upon a rock; it is not to be swayed or moved by other revivals or other new loves. Once it had passed the perilous period of the Wagner craze, the musical excitements of a still later growth were powerless to stir it.

A recognized and universal art treasure may, however, for lack of worthy interpretation, fail to be displayed in its full glory. Mozart here is like Shakespeare. Both of them demand, in order to do them justice, interpreters specially gifted and specially trained. The plays of Shakespeare require *acting* of the highest order; the operas of Mozart *singing* of the highest order. There is barely enough of the former in the world. Of the latter I may say without hesitation that in this country vocal material for the perfect rendering of Mozart's operatic masterpieces has long been wanting.

In other words, our interpretative resources have failed to keep level with the renascence of public interest in these most exacting examples of lyric art. Something has been lost, or at least is in imminent danger of becoming lost; and it is the purpose of the following pages to show what has been lost and how it may be found again.

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II

THE LINES OF THE MOZART TRADITION

Among the great masters Mozart stands alone. His universal genius made him pre-eminent in every sphere of music. I will not say that his achievements were nobler or loftier than those of Purcell, Bach, Handel, or of Beethoven; but as a whole they were unique.

The death of Mozart ended a great school, to which later schools proved incapable of adding aught that was peculiar to its particular character or type. Until Beethoven discovered his new paths, music was no more than dormant.

At the end of a period in Art, a 'pause', or even a 'full-close', is marked against the style which is the characteristic quality of that period. Just as you cannot surpass the product itself, neither can you improve upon the manner of rendering or representation which is germane to it. It remains in its purity the essential style of the period or of the master who invented it. It may be changed or modified; it may afterwards blend with some later style. But then it is no longer pure.

How long, then, can a style be said to be actually 'living'? Is its life limited to the existence of its creator? Certainly not; for when he dies his works do not, and his original interpreters may survive him for years. Rather, the living manifestation, that is, the immediate, direct, authoritative exemplification, of a style continues so long as its original exponents remain alive and active to embody and illustrate it. After that there remains only a Tradition.

In music the continuance of a tradition runs along two parallel lines—the instrumental and the vocal; and to-day, in my opinion, the instrumental tradition of Mozart remains as vivid, and as sure in observance and execution, as it was a hundred years ago. The

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line of executive skill has been throughout of consistently equal merit, and has therefore remained unbroken.

With the vocal tradition of Mozart it has not been the same. There has been a perceptible deterioration in the executive level, a gradual weakening in the succession of interpreters, a growing loss of touch with the special qualities and attributes that marked the original realization of the master's ideas. This has been especially noticeable during the past thirty years, the very period in which the average degree of excellence in the performance of Mozart's orchestral and chamber music has, at any rate in this country, tended to improve.

The explanation may be seen in the following facts: first, that Mozart's vocal music is, on the whole, much harder to perform than his instrumental music. Much of it was written for exceptional voices and for the artists of exceptional capacity who lived in his time. Secondly, that its difficulty has often been increased by the gradual raising of the musical pitch to the modern level (it is nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ tone higher now than in Mozart's time). The higher the *tessitura* or texture of vocal music, the greater the demand upon the physical resources of the singer. This change, on the other hand, has not affected the instrumentalists at all. Thirdly, that the standard of singing is lower than it was, both upon the operatic stage and in the concert-room. The voices of contemporary singers do not compare for beauty with those of the past; nor does their technical training, save in the rarest instances, nearly approach the same height of perfection. Fourthly, that this falling-off, which synchronized with the decline of Italian Opera and with the neglect of Mozart, has interrupted tradition, and has left us, just when the Mozart operas are regaining their popularity, with less vocal talent for continuing it.

The tradition itself has not been lost; of that I am convinced. Nor will it be so as long as there are teachers who jealously guard it, who are capable of imparting it to gifted and industrious pupils, and who will insist that those pupils shall not follow the modern custom of curtailing the period of study and seeking their public débuts with undue haste.

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III

THE TEACHING OF MANUEL GARCIA

To justify my claim of knowledge of the vocal tradition of Mozart, I point to the sources of my knowledge: my teacher, Manuel Garcia, and those singers of Mozart whom I heard in his operas at Covent Garden and Her Majesty's Theatres during the last thirty years of the nineteenth century.

Manuel Garcia (1805–1908) was in his seventieth year when he came to live at my parents' house in Bentinck Street, Manchester Square. There he carried on his private teaching for nearly ten years, before moving to his ultimate residence at Cricklewood. When he came to us I was a youth of eighteen, and I studied with him continuously during his first four years there. Whatever I did not learn from him personally, I had ample opportunity to learn through hearing his lessons to other students, amongst whom were many vocalists already before the public. Despite his years Garcia seemed still 'young', and was a wonderfully hard worker.

Among other things I learned the family history of the Garcias —about the wonderful Elder Manuel (father of my master, of Malibran, and of Pauline Viardot-Garcia), that stern Spanish martinet of the operatic stage, who took his son and his famous daughter to America in the twenties to introduce Italian opera and Rossini's *Barber of Seville* to New York.[1] Grove's *Dictionary* mentions this celebrated musician: 'Beginning as a chorister in the [Seville] Cathedral at the age of six, at seventeen he was already well known as a composer, singer, actor, and conductor.' The record is interesting, for it was only some ten weeks before

[1] The family of the Garcias was happily described by Chorley as one of 'representative artists, whose power, genius, and originality have impressed a permanent trace on the records of the methods of vocal execution and ornament'.

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Manuel Garcia the Elder attained his seventeenth birthday (January 1792) that Mozart had died at Vienna and had there been interred in a pauper's grave. I was therefore the pupil of a man whose father had actually acquired his Mozart style at first hand before it had become a Tradition; in other words, during the lifetime of the composer.

When, therefore, my master used to speak to me, as he would occasionally, of the great singers of his younger days, and describe what they had accomplished with their glorious voices and their inimitable art, I listened to him with a feeling of awe for that golden period which seemed then so remote as to be surrounded with a halo of romance; especially when he spoke of the famous Madame Pasta, the particular object of his adoration—'an extraordinary woman, with not only a voice of haunting beauty but a nobility and grandeur of style that has never been excelled!'

Yet he who said this had himself, some five and thirty years previously, been the teacher who restored and properly 'placed' the voice of the great Jenny Lind; who had given many lessons to Christine Nilsson and Charles Santley, both still in their prime. Magnificent still were Adelina Patti and Theresa Tietjens; while the two matchless tenors, Mario and Giuglini, the famous soprano Giulia Grisi, and the great contralto Alboni (whom I had then just heard sing in private) had but recently retired from the scene. Could it be, I would ask my master, that the great artists of the seventies were really already so much lower in stature than the giants of half a century before? 'Unquestionably,' said Manuel Garcia.

But at the period I speak of the Tradition itself was very much alive—infinitely more so, of course, than twenty years later. In 1872 I heard *Don Giovanni* for the first time at Covent Garden with a cast that included Patti (Zerlina), Marianne Brandt (Donna Elvira), Faure (Don Giovanni), Nicolini (Don Ottavio), and Ciampi (Leporello). Three years later I heard the same opera at Her Majesty's with Tietjens, Christine Nilsson, and Trebelli-Bettini in the three female rôles. At about the same time I heard the *Magic Flute* with Tietjens as Pamina, Ilma di Murska (also

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Marimon) as the Queen of Night, Santley as Papageno, and Foli as Sarastro; and the *Nozze di Figaro* with Tietjens as the Countess, Pauline Lucca (or Trebelli) as Cherubino, Marimon as Susanna, Cotogni (or Faure) as Figaro, and Graziani as the Count.

Most of these artists were the most distinguished Mozart singers of their time. Their manner of interpreting Mozart's operas tallied more or less exactly with the general rules laid down by Garcia, and were so far in accordance with the right Tradition. Their rendering of every phrase and every note was unforgettable.

In 1894 I helped my old master (then in his ninetieth year, but still astonishingly youthful) to prepare for the press his *Hints on Singing*,[1] the last text-book that he wrote. We worked together upon it for several months, and a very wonderful experience it was. Dealing with every characteristic point of the category of Italian ornamentation and embellishment, this little work leaves no doubt regarding the correct interpretation of the vocal problems of the eighteenth century.

It was in the preface to his *Hints on Singing* that Garcia uttered his famous words on the 'decline of the florid style'. One of its most important causes was, he thought,

> 'the disappearance of the race of great singers, who, besides originating this art, carried it to its highest point of excellence. The impresario, influenced by the exigencies of the modern prima donna, has been constrained to offer less gifted and accomplished *virtuosi* to the composer, who in turn has been compelled to simplify the rôle of the voice and rely more and more upon orchestral effects. Thus singing is becoming as much a lost art as the manufacture of Mandarin china or the varnish used by the old masters.'

Manuel Garcia rarely expressed an opinion upon the merits or failings of the more prominent artists who were singing Mozart

[1] Published by Ascherberg, Hopwood & Crew, Ltd., 16 Mortimer Street, London, W.

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at the time I was studying with him. Indeed he very seldom went to the Opera. But I remember his telling me that he had heard Patti as Zerlina a season or two after her début (1861), and had admired her immensely, though he could not agree with one enthusiastic critic who had declared that her Zerlina was 'better than Malibran's'. He thought no one in the world ever compared with his sister except Pasta.

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IV

THE VOCAL DEMANDS OF MOZART'S MUSIC

A DISTINGUISHED authority, Mr. Edward J. Dent, has recently stated[1] that what the London opera-goers and critics of the seventies 'liked best were Mozart's most obvious tunes'; and that this 'naturally led to the notion that Mozart's operas were nothing more than a string of pretty tunes, tunes so pretty that no one but Patti could ever be allowed to sing them'.

Nothing could be farther from the facts. Whatever our elders may have misunderstood concerning the growing complexities of modern music, they knew their Mozart well and listened to him with a degree of appreciation which their greater familiarity with the vocal art of their era made wholly trustworthy. To realize this it is only necessary to turn up the files of the old newspapers and read the operatic criticisms—often prosy, sometimes prejudiced, but always independent, fearless, and authoritative—of writers like Davison and Chorley.

Moreover, it is unfair to the memory of the other great singers of the mid-nineteenth century to suppose that Adelina Patti, because she was called the *diva*, enjoyed any sort of monopoly of the 'Mozart tunes'. In all her career she sang but one Mozart rôle, namely, Zerlina; whereas Tietjens was equally good, in the public estimation, in the three parts of Donna Anna, the Countess, and Pamina. Patti in later years essayed 'Voi che sapete'; but she had not studied it as she did Zerlina with Maurice Strakosch (her brother-in-law and 'coach', who had acted as accompanist for Pasta when the latter was teaching); and here Patti missed the right rendering. On the other hand, both Pauline Lucca and Trebelli were exquisite Cherubinos, and their delivery of the immortal air was absolutely without flaw.

Most of the traditional Mozart singers whom it was my good

[1] *The Nation and the Athenaeum*, 17 March 1923.

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fortune to hear received their training from teachers whose memories, if not their actual instruction, dated back to those surviving artists who were actively working upon the stage either in Mozart's lifetime or during the years that immediately followed. They were thus the third generation of his interpreters. It may therefore reasonably be assumed that they did exactly what he intended, and I cannot but think that he would have approved their treatment of his music as surely as he would have admired their voices and their pure Italian method.

This method was the one then being taught by such Mozartians of the second generation as Garcia, Lamperti, Sangiovanni, and Nava (the teacher of Santley). It was the method which Wagner openly proclaimed to be indispensable for the satisfactory rendering of the trying declamatory music of his operas and music-dramas. Indeed, practically the whole of the experienced German artists who created the heroes and heroines of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and *Parsifal* were trained in the Italian school.

So long as the notable singers of that generation lived and flourished the Tradition held its own. All so far was well; but when they began to retire from the stage in the final decades of the past century, it quickly became apparent that they had no worthy imitators. So gradually the succession of the Mozart tradition weakened, until lately it has broken completely, though an occasional demonstration may still be heard.

To re-discover the art of these old singers, it is necessary to know what demands were made on them by Mozart's music. Mozart was surrounded by such consummate vocalists that apparently he could never write anything too difficult or too brilliant for them. Anyhow, he was too wise to write beyond his artists' powers. But the difficulty of his vocal music did not lie solely in its *bravura*, its daring *fioriturі*, its flights into *altissimo*. It lay even more, perhaps, in its extreme simplicity.

For Mozart was one of the greatest tune-makers that ever lived; and there is nothing harder to sing beautifully than a simple tune. Other composers before him also wrote wonderful tunes—Purcell, Bach, Handel, Lully, Gluck, Haydn. But

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as a composer for the stage this tune-maker transcended them all. Mozart may have reeled off his tunes by the hundred; but if he fitted the simplest of them to words, it never failed to embody in every accent and every phrase the full emotional content of the poet's lines. Alike as a piece of vocal music and as a vehicle for the expression of human feeling, it was complete, perfect in itself. The consequence is that it demands from the singer, besides a simplicity equal with its own, a purity of *legato*, a charm of style, a certain warmth of expression, a depth of sentiment and even of passion, which the music of Mozart's contemporaries and his predecessors (with the exception perhaps of Gluck) had never required. He was a man of strong temperament, and every bar he wrote for the voice overflowed with the essence of his own nature.

Many singers to-day fail, if for no other reason, to do justice to Mozart because they approach his music without the necessary warmth and intensity of feeling. They think that it suffices to sing him calmly and prettily. They could make no greater mistake, unless it be perhaps to treat him sentimentally and warble his 'pretty tunes' as though there were nothing beneath their surface. In reality there is so much that every bar needs to be deeply studied and thoroughly understood. Above all, to do Mozart justice you must love him.

It is often said nowadays that beauty of vocal tone does not matter as much as musical knowledge, rhythmical accuracy, and clear diction. That may apply to liturgical Tudor music or the secular writings of the old English composers. Somehow loveliness of vocal quality and temperamental curves have not invariably been associated with these things. A tradition here is not directly to be traced at all. The right reading can, however, be sufficiently gathered from the printed page, and 'sound common sense' may be trusted to supply the rest.

But of what avail would scholarship, historical erudition, or the cold process of reasoning be to the artist in the achievement of the right singing of Mozart? He may hate the so-called shackles of tradition as much as he pleases; he may treat it with contempt,

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dispense with it, deny its authority or its very existence. But he will probably live long enough to see the operas of Mozart in even worse plight, for lack of adequate vocal skill and traditional handling, than they are even now.

To no other cause can be attributed the unquestionable deterioration that has already come about. It is certainly not that to-day human beings are not born with equally beautiful voices. It can only be because—here in England at least—modern conditions do not provide or insist upon the essential training, the essential technique, the essential knowledge of what Mozart really demands.

Mozart demands everything. To begin with, a beautiful voice controlled and directed by correct scientific breathing; ample resonance; an equal scale achieved by the perfect blending (or if you like it better, the obliteration) of the registers; a clean attack; a steady *sostenuto*; a smooth, pure *legato*; an elegant use of the *portamento*; a well-graduated *messa di voce* or management of *crescendos* and *diminuendos*; flexibility, agility, and brilliancy of execution; and, not least of all, the capacity to sing absolutely in tune.

With vocalization of this kind the obstacles of language should give no trouble. The right principles of articulation, diction, and accent, the distinct enunciation of every consonant, are more important than the question of the language in which Mozart is sung. My personal choice is for the language in which he composed his music. But naturally the text of his operas, to be comprehensible to an English audience, are best sung in English.

In the rare but necessary combination above described are to be found the chief material and technique of the singer's art. One voice may, of course, be less beautiful, less flexible, less extended in range than another; but those are merely individual limitations, . . . and Mozart has written for voices of every type and size. Apart from physical and technical considerations, there still remain the important questions of musical intelligence and culture, rhythmical sense, dramatic feeling, and the instinctive gift for interpretation. I will first deal, as briefly as I can, with the technical.

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V

THE TECHNIQUE OF THE 'BEL CANTO'

I do not propose to attempt here more than a bare description of the principal features of the so-called 'Bel Canto', or old Italian method of singing. A closer analysis, if required by the reader, must be sought for in pages specially devoted to the method itself, without reference to the interpretation of any particular composer.

Many people imagine that there is involved in the teaching of the Italian method something in the nature of a great secret. As a matter of fact, there is nothing more secret about it than there is about the characteristics of the tradition of Mozart.

In a recent review of a book of musical recollections, the complaint was made that it contained no suggestions for remedying certain vocal abuses and malpractices denounced by the author; the reason given for the omission was that probably the latter had thought it unadvisable to give away the 'stock-in-trade' of the teacher's art. The true answer to that suggestion is that if trade secrets of the kind ever existed they were divulged by Manuel Garcia years ago.

It is not easy, of course, to grasp and co-ordinate the various factors that make up the true art of singing from the printed page alone, nor can they effectively be put into practice save under skilful and experienced guidance. Art is a thing of imitation, and in the study of singing you require the aid of the living model and critic as absolutely as in the study of painting or dancing. Nevertheless, a clear record or statement of facts is essential, and the printed page may therefore be regarded as a valuable accessory to the work of the teacher.

Garcia recognized this when he published in this country an English translation of his famous *Traité complet de l'Art du Chant*, which first appeared in Paris in 1840; and again when he supple-

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mented it fifty-four years later with his *Hints on Singing*, which embodied all the subsequent experience garnered during a lifetime of successful teaching.

The main essentials of the Italian system are the mastery of—

(*a*) Breathing
(*b*) Resonance
(*c*) Vowel-formation and Attack
(*d*) The Sostenuto (Sustained Tone)
(*e*) The Legato (Slow Scale, Registers)
(*f*) The Portamento
(*g*) The 'Messa di Voce'
(*h*) Agility (Coloratura, Ornaments, etc.).

This order of progression is natural but by no means invariable. For example, the formation of a vowel shape must necessarily precede the attack of a sound, but the study of its manifold variations would have to come later. So the slow *scale* will naturally proceed simultaneously with the *legato*; whilst the quick scales form part of the acquisition of *agility*.

(*a*) Breathing

Although scientific *Breathing* stands both at the base and the apex of the whole vocal structure, it is, nevertheless, the thing most neglected and most misunderstood in the average modern practice of this art. Correct instruction in respiration is, I think, the feature which chiefly differentiates the good teacher from the bad, the efficient master from the charlatan who misleads, cheats, and defrauds the innocent and unwary pupil. We cannot too frequently repeat the familiar saying of Maria Celloni:

Chi sa respirare sa cantare.[1]

But commonly the novice is told, if told anything at all about respiration, to take a 'deep breath'; to fill the lungs with air as though crowding the chest with ozone or inhaling the perfume

[1] He who knows how to breathe knows how to sing.

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of flowers; to breathe in or out 'from the waist' (wherever that may be), or even to expand the abdomen with a vigorous outward push of that obscure muscle, the diaphragm.

Obedience to these familiar rules must inevitably tend to guide the student in the wrong direction and lead to bad habits which, once acquired, are exceedingly hard to eradicate. The breathing taught by the old Italian masters entirely reverses the order and changes even the physical character of the usual processes of inhalation and exhalation which form part of our daily life. Singers proceed differently; hold their bodies differently; train their muscles and organs to act differently. And yet from first to last the whole procedure is normal, beneficial to the health, unfailing in its accomplishment of the right result.

One seldom hears talk of abdominal breathing. It is this filling of the lowest part of the lungs by the expansion of the stomach which not only flattens (and therewith locates) the hidden diaphragm, but prepares for its contraction when the stomach is drawn in and the ribs are raised, thus giving the necessary impetus for the expulsion of the breath by muscular pressure from below the middle of the body, not from the region of the chest.

This mode of inhalation is doubly beneficial: (1) because we are only able completely to inflate the lower part of the lungs by slowly introducing the air there first and filling the upper part during the same inhalation afterwards; (2) because, where we feel the breath go, thence shall we expel it; and, inasmuch as steadiness and purity of tone are only to be obtained by this *upward* pressure from between the lower ribs, just above the stomach, we thereby learn how to avoid all superfluous or ill-directed pressure; we learn how to control our breathing action from the region of the diaphragm; and how, finally, to keep the chest high and firm, utilizing it as a receptacle for air not inhaled directly into it from without, but pressed into it from the lung spaces underneath.

Thus concentrated, the breath virtually becomes 'compressed air', that is, air possessing an inherent force of its own. Hence its greater power, moving always by muscular contraction in the

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upward (the necessary) direction, and so doing its work of creating tone in all degrees of loudness with the minimum of physical action or effort, and with a total absence of strain.

This I believe to be the old Italian system of breathing, as it was taught by Manuel Garcia, and as I have taught it myself for many years. The secret of its success lies primarily in the controlling power of the abdominal support and action. Much depends, however, upon a correct attitude of the body, the capacity for retention and expulsion of the breath in any required volume or degree, and the ability to perform the mechanical functions of the breathing apparatus either slowly or quickly, as may be needed, with the same subconscious, automatic accuracy, smoothness, and noiselessness of operation.

(*b*) Resonance

The old Italian teachers had no trouble in obtaining a bright, ringing tone. 'Resonance', therefore, may not have entered very largely into their theory, but was far from being ignored in their practice. Thanks chiefly to their 'open' vowels an easy 'forward' tone came naturally to the majority of their students, especially the native ones. If it did not, the masters opened their pupils' throats (temporarily at least) until the sound-waves had learnt to find their way to every facial cavity or space (besides the mouth) that was capable of 'reflecting' a vocal tone. The idea seems simple enough. The voice, in order to acquire its full vibrant power, must have the aid of a 'reflector', just as surely as the light burning in a lighthouse. The singer can no more dispense with its aid than the performer on the piano or the violin could dispense with that of a sounding-board.

As the act of singing is a natural organic function, common to the majority of civilized people, there is no need to discuss here the physiology of tone production. The point is, rather, whereabouts is that tone situated or sounding when it has left the larynx? The answer is that a clear note is, at the moment of its utterance, instantly ringing clear and true in its ultimate

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position, projected and maintained there by steady diaphragmatic breath-pressure, and enhanced in strength and colour by shape and other influences. To the singer the resulting sensation is that the tone is coming not from the throat at all, but existing ready-made in the area to which it is reflected.

Free, unobstructed access to these 'forward' cavities can alone enable the voice to obtain all the advantages of complete resonance. Properly directed and well supported by the breath, it can entirely escape the danger of a nasal quality and attain increased beauty of timbre, diversity of colour, and penetrative power.

(*c*) Vowel-formation and Attack

The formation of some vowel shape must necessarily precede the attack of a vocal sound—an act which involves the opening of the mouth. If we sing with the mouth shut we hum; but the act of humming is not without its use as a means for indicating where the vibration of the sound-waves may be *felt* re-echoing in the facial resonators when unable to make their exit by the ordinary route.

When we open the mouth to sing a note, it must be done by dropping the lower jaw, and without moving the head, which remains erect and still. The tongue flattens as the jaw descends, whilst the pharyngeal space at the back of the throat enlarges as the soft palate rises and forms the roof of the mouth into a dome or arch. The shape thus created gives us, without further preliminary action, the natural mould for the formation of the universal vowel sound 'ah'—that is, the first vowel of the Italian alphabet.

The formation of all other vowels, no matter what the language, is simply a variation on this fundamental process, although the sense of their location seems to the singer to be different with different vowels. In reality vowel sounds should all *feel* alike, to the extent that they feel so when we speak them. Only, some vowels create a more naturally 'forward' position than others, and those that do not must, by correct treatment, be made to acquire an equal degree of resonance.

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The outcome of this assimilation is that the singer finds both tone and vowel impinging upon the same identical facial area, that is to say, in the 'mask'; and there alone, will their union be made perfect. In no other fashion and by no other mechanical means can 'speech and song' be resolved into a single function.

Garcia says (*Hints on Singing*, p. 12) that 'the Pharynx ought to be considered the real mouth of a singer'. The idea is not an easy one to convey in words, but I understand it to mean that, just as the mouth contains the organs of speech (with especial reference to consonants), so the right place for forming vowel shapes and originating tonal character is the passage leading from the throat to the mouth and the nasal cavities. I also believe the idea in question to have been an essential feature of the old Italian method.

Another idea was that the utterance of 'open' sonorous vowels in a natural manner ensured a free, elastic movement of the jaw, without the least muscular stiffness, leaving the tongue 'limp and motionless', yet not entailing an excessively wide opening of the mouth, which 'favours neither low nor high notes'. This, the true singing position, is a matter of the utmost importance, and it is peculiarly associated with the teaching of Manuel Garcia.

The assuming of the singing position as a mental and physical attitude corresponds to the spontaneous gesture of the speaker. It coincides with the inhalation of the breath, and is immediately followed by the act of phonation or *attack* of the sound. The old Italians were right in their location of the true source of attack when they said *respirare, e poi appoggiare*: inhale, and then support with the breath. An inflated air-cushion, once the screw is tightened, affords a firm and resilient support for the whole weight of the body. Similarly, the voice must rest easily and comfortably upon the solid column of air that holds it in position.

And it must do this from the outset. From the moment that the singing position is assumed and the vowel shape formed, the

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diaphragm takes control; the breath is impelled upwards into the chest, towards the throat, where it becomes tone, and towards the resonators, where it becomes a voice. The whole process is comprised in a single physical movement, in a smooth, even exhalation. Therewith, not in the throat nor with any perceptible action of the glottis, but in the ultimate 'forward' area to which it has been projected, does the attack of the vocal tone actually begin.

I need scarcely add that the misuse of Garcia's scientific definition, *coup de la glotte*, is no longer tolerated by the best teachers.

In vocal attack the intensity of the glottic action may vary according to circumstances. It depends largely upon the nature of the utterance or the emotion to be expressed. A perceptible glottic impetus is not in certain cases inadvisable. For the singer there must be but one aim—that the tone, whatever its character, is to be so *prepared*, mentally and physically, that it shall sound perfect from the start.

(*d*) The Sostenuto (Sustained Tone)

In the old Italian school of singing nothing used to be more admired and cultivated than an absolutely steady tone. To-day even in Italy a strong *vibrato* or a quivering *tremolo* is generally preferred. Consequently the modern Milanese 'maestro' encourages it.

Whether a trembling tone can ever furnish a satisfactory medium for the singing of Mozart is another question. We have evidence, both internal and external, that the voices for which Mozart wrote did not suffer from this particular drawback. The sin did not become common until some years after it had started at the Paris Opéra in the midway of the last century. Meyerbeer, Auber, and Gounod openly expressed their detestation of it. In alliance either with a strain of pure melody or a declamatory passage, a trembling voice, no matter how pleasing its quality *per se*, has always sounded disagreeable to the ears of an English audience.

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Intelligent use of the method of breathing described above practically obviates all danger of an unsteady tone. Instinct for the exactly right amount of breath-pressure should be natural to the good singer and made reliable by practice and experience. It contributes, moreover, to the liquid purity and clearness of timbre resulting from an undisturbed adjustment of the vocal cords.

This economy of breath and this adjustment are interdependent, since the muscles of the throat respond and resist automatically in exact proportion to the varying degrees of pressure from the lungs. Yet the need for care does not end there. The singer intent upon the tone must not think of the throat, but of where and how the tone itself is being reflected or placed : that is the true *point d'appui.*

It follows that a perfect *sostenuto* can only be obtained when the singer has the sensation of direct and uninterrupted breath support extending from the region of the diaphragm to the area of resonance.

The gradations of strength and varieties of tone-colour, like the cultivation of the *mezza voce,* are things that cannot be wholly explained or taught in books. They are best acquired by careful listening and clever imitation.

The value of a beautiful *mezza voce* (' half voice ' never seems to convey the same idea) cannot be over-estimated. Every singer ought to possess it ; but, like the old *falsetto,* now happily discarded by most singers, it comes more easily to some voices than others. Learning the *mezza voce* is not unlike acquiring the knack of a stroke at golf or lawn-tennis ; and the ear must be kept upon the tone as the eye upon the ball.

The art of skilfully graduating a *crescendo* or *diminuendo* (dealt with later under the head of ' Messa di Voce ') should be associated with a constant endeavour to purify the tone. It is the pure sound that travels farthest, not the merely loud one. The delicate *mezza voce* of a soprano or a tenor can provide an instantaneous contrast not less delightful than that of the most exquisite variation in nuances of colour. These are things that

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must be studied and worked at, for years if necessary, until they are definitely gained.

(*e*) The Legato (Slow Scale, Registers)

It is one thing to sing a single note well. To sing a group of notes all equally well, with a clean, direct transition from the middle of one to the middle of the next involves a good deal more than appears upon the surface.

It means, to begin with, command of the pure *Legato*, a term more readily understood on an instrument than in the human voice. The singing of the scale in the legato manner has often been compared to the stringing of a row of pearls. When they are perfectly matched they form the perfect necklace. The act of uniting notes identical in quality and colour with unbroken smoothness constitutes the perfect legato.

The first step is the management of the breath. Every note must be supported from the region of the diaphragm with the degree of pressure that it demands, not for itself alone, but in its relation to its neighbours and the true gradation of the entire series. The higher the pitch of the note the greater the degree of pressure required, and vice versa; the ear and the sense of volume must combine to secure and preserve the even gradation of the scale up or down. The great point is to make sure of the identity of the tone.

It is not necessary to begin either at the top or the bottom of a scale. The old Italians were wise enough not to enforce an arbitrary rule on this point. Their plan (adopted also in Paris by the great singer and teacher, Faure) was to find the best note in the middle of the voice and use it as the pivot on which to balance the two halves of the scale lying above and below it. In this way they had less difficulty in obtaining an even scale and a smooth legato.

This device is so effective that many years ago I invented for the study of it a form of rhythmical slow scale in three sections, each commencing on the dominant. The key must be varied so

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that the dominant in every case may afford the safest model for the succeeding notes :

This slow scale must be sung with the dark or ' closed ' tone (*voix sombre*), whereas quick scales and runs are best executed in the bright or ' open ' tone (*voix claire*), which lends itself more readily to passages requiring flexibility.[1]

Just as the dominant or initial note supplies the model for the others, so must the breathing of the descending scale be imitated in the ascending scale (not the reverse). The legato is always easier, neater, and to be employed with better gradation on the down scale—certainly at first.

The point is that, whether the voice be mounting or descending the scale, the same note shall always be sung in the same manner ; that the ' pivot ' tone, when returned to or sung in passing, shall invariably sound quite the same.

The ability, however, to manage this depends also upon the correct blending of the registers, an important matter upon which I can only touch briefly here. Unless the differences of sensation and changes of mechanism which characterize what are known as the ' registers ' of the human voice have so merged into each other as to create a harmonious whole, smoothness of scale or legato singing is out of the question.

The provision of registers, with their three different mechanical actions, enables the same vocal cords to produce a succession of sounds of extensive range. They thus add to what might otherwise be a relatively limited compass and provide for an infinitely

[1] Both formations are shown with diagrams and described in *Hints on Singing*, p. 11.

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greater variety of timbres. Until Manuel Garcia discovered and invented the laryngoscope, the nature of these different mechanisms was not understood; the effect was known, but not the cause. From close observation, however, one fact appears—that we must not alter our manner of singing because we feel the mechanism to be in some subtle way altering its automatic procedure. Interference is bound to entail disaster.

The solution of the problem lies in uniformity—uniformity of breathing, of 'singing position', of resonance—the last is perhaps the most important. So long as the voice is securely reflected in its ultimate forward position and is sustained there by the breath, supported from the diaphragm, the vocal cords will enjoy the elasticity and freedom essential for modifying their action, without that sudden change or 'break' which is commonly heard. Otherwise the modification cannot be made imperceptibly, and the abrupt transition from one register to another will become audible. The blending tone, if properly graduated, extends over three or at most four notes, to which the French give the name of *voix mixte*.[1]

With the aid of this *voix mixte*, the union of the 'chest' and 'medium', of 'medium' and 'head' tones, proceeding either up or down the scale, the voice can be brought into line throughout its whole compass. Once the uniformity is achieved the secret of the legato, elusive as it may appear, becomes comparatively clear. The eclectic ear of the singer must do the rest.

(*f*) The Portamento

The portamento resembles the legato, only in its execution the carrying of the voice is made audible over the interval separating the two notes.

[1] The finest exercise I know for obtaining clearness and uniformity of tone in the medium register is that which Garcia gave to Jenny Lind when she went to him in Paris in 1841 to 'mend her worn and uneven voice'. It will be found on p. 16 of *Hints on Singing*. It is not to be used merely as a remedy, but as a study for maintaining a ringing quality of tone on the descending scales, and at the same time preparing the way for a natural pure legato.

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The mastery of the portamento is not more elusive than that of the legato; but its application to a musical phrase, the choice of a right mode of executing it, and various other considerations which musical feeling and experience alone can satisfy, combine to make it the more subtle and difficult device of the two. In the singing of Mozart both play an exceedingly important part.

The English word 'slur' is capable of too many interpretations, and has not the same precise significance as the Italian *portamento* or the French *port de voix*. These imply a mode of carrying the voice which, if employed gracefully and in the right place, always adds character, elegance, force, or intensity of expression, to the delivery of a phrase. Without one of these purposes in view it had better not be used. But, correctly to fulfil the traditions of the Italian school, it cannot be dispensed with.

To enhance the elegance of a phrase, the portamento should as a rule be lightly sung. Merely pushing the voice up or dropping it down from note to note deprives the device of all charm. The tone must be delicately poised and supported by the breath; it must likewise be carried without jerk or interruption over the whole of the interval, attaining its goal with perfect intonation and quality. Correct breath-pressure and intelligent anticipation of resonance will alone make this possible.

To impart declamatory force or vigour of sentiment, the portamento should be employed with an energy and directness that leaves no doubt as to its object, yet always with the greatest discretion. The intention of the composer must be carefully studied, and this in the case of Mozart will scarcely leave room for mistaken zeal or choice of the wrong place. The portamento is not invariably indicated, but where it is not, tradition and taste enable us to mark the spot.

. . . .

As an ordinary device for adding sentiment to the music, the portamento has been exaggerated and overdone to an extent that has created a prejudice against its use at any point. That, of course, is absurd, like most objections that go to an extreme. Sixty years ago the excessive use of the portamento was unknown.

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The great singers used it in just the right measure and no more; they made it rare enough for the ear to be grateful for its charm, never 'slurring' two or three intervals in succession or spreading the tone up and down with sickly heaviness. I remember the period when the exaggeration gradually set in. The song-writers of the eighties were as much responsible for it as the singers, one of the most popular of them, Grieg, suffering from an inordinate love of portamento, as his songs show.

Then began a reaction. The more cultivated English audiences became familiar with the Passion-music and cantatas of Bach, and learned to appreciate the proper reticence in this matter. They began to enjoy a final cadence without the customary upward or downward *glissade* to the concluding note. Musicians perceived that the artistic singers were imitating the grace, perception, and restraint of players of the violin or the violoncello like Joachim, Sarasate, Ysaye, Lady Hallé, Hollman, Hausmann, and Piatti, who were the right models from whom to acquire them.

(*g*) The 'Messa di Voce'

The English meaning of this curious term is naïvely but accurately defined by Garcia in *Hints on Singing*. The *messa di voce*, he says, stands for the process of singing 'swelled sounds', which should 'begin pianissimo and by degrees acquire increasing force till they arrive at their loudest, which should happen at half their length; then the process should be reversed'.

The apparently simple act of swelling and diminishing tone, not alone on single notes but on sentences or phrases, is the central characteristic of the old Italian school. The mastery of the 'straight line' must come first, as it would precede that of the 'curve' in drawing. But one does not suffice without the other—above all in the singing of Mozart, who demanded the *messa di voce* at nearly every turn of every piece that he wrote for the voice.

Here, once more, it is diaphragmatic breathing that enables the singer to accomplish the well-directed support of a steady tone

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while swelling or diminishing the strength and volume with perfect evenness and regularity of gradation.

The action of the *messa di voce* becomes, with practice, mechanical and subconscious. The utmost care is therefore needed in the exercise of a dynamic force that is liable to over-assertion and to produce a certain monotony of style. It may be constantly used, but only if guided by ease and economy of breath-pressure, coupled with musical intelligence.

A Mozart singer who does not possess this gift would, in my judgement, be an anomaly.

(*b*) Agility (Coloratura, Ornaments, etc.)

It is a common belief that only light voices are fitted by nature for the execution of florid or *coloratura* music. That is a mis-apprehension which has only grown up in recent times, and did not prevail among the old teachers, because their pupils, even those with the heaviest organs, were continually demonstrating the opposite. Bach and Handel, Mozart and Rossini, wrote many passages that are *tours de force*, it is true; but, generally speaking, the former did not write their runs and 'divisions', or the last-named his brilliant passages and cadenzas, for what they would have called exceptional voices. They wrote them indiscriminately for singers of every calibre—and for basses and contraltos as much as for sopranos and tenors.

The basis of all flexibility is the pure vocalization of the quick scale upon the bright tone, or *voix claire*. In order to be able to sing clearly, evenly, and rapidly an octave or more of notes, one must be able to do the same thing on two, three, or five notes. That means careful and constant practice with correct breathing and mechanism, adequate resonance, a true ear, freedom from muscular rigidity of the throat or larynx, and the natural impulse which imparts ease and abandonment to the steady, effortless flow of tone.

The free oscillation of the tone from note to note necessary for the preparation of the quick scale is also the right beginning

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for the practice of the shake or trill. But when more than two notes are attempted the larynx does not oscillate; the voice glides smoothly over the group with a slight accent upon each note, so that, no matter how rapid the movement, the singing of the scale becomes clear, definite, flexible, and of even strength throughout.

The main factor in the attainment of this lightness, elasticity, and accuracy is the supreme controlling action of the breath, working in complete accord with mind and ear. To sing scales crisply and clearly we must be able to *think* them in perfection.

Similar rules apply to the practice of runs (or 'divisions'), which form perhaps the most characteristic and persistent feature of Italian music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The mastery of these is the key to every branch of florid singing. They provide the groundwork for all vocal agility, for the ease and brilliancy of rendering which alone justifies the survival of this class of music.

Apart from smoothness and beauty of tone, a clear accentuation of the various rhythms is extremely important. Usually the accent falls upon the first note of a group of four, six, or eight notes, but the singer must be able to place it anywhere without interfering with the rhythm and clarity of the run. Nothing can be worse than triplets sung with a slurred and indistinct middle note, except perhaps a jumbled 'turn' of which the final note is not audible.

In the singing of Mozart, correctly-marked rhythms—he has such an extraordinary variety of them—constitute a vital feature, notably in the concerted music of the operas and in the play between solo voice and orchestra. The ability to observe peculiar or divergent rhythms, in addition, is frequently essential in passages where agility is also called for. The study of one should therefore go hand in hand with the other; though naturally the scales and runs have to be mastered first.

With Mozart's special *ornamentations*, the point is that he treats the various types of ornaments, not as mere embellishments, but as integral parts of the composition. He thus enhances their

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dignity and makes their faultless execution of equal importance with that of the main melody.

The master had his favourite 'ornaments'. Grace notes simply abound in his music: turns (*gruppetti*), *appoggiature*, repeated and staccato sounds, shakes, slurred notes (*notes coulées*) constantly arrest the attention of the student. One and all demand the utmost purity and flexibility of voice and delicacy and finish of execution.

Mozart was especially fond of *notes coulées*, which are very difficult to sing really well. They belonged rather to the technique of the violin or the 'cello than of the voice. Two gliding notes to a single 'up or down bow' are comparatively easy to play (compare the semiquaver passages in the *Tannhäuser* overture); but two notes to a syllable for a few bars in succession present a greater difficulty to the singer because of the certainty, smoothness, and grace that are demanded of the executant, who should here closely imitate the violin.

At the root of the matter lies the command of agility, and every student of this art who works diligently enough can be trained to become a more or less accomplished singer of florid music.

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VI

LANGUAGE AND DICTION

To the code of laws that governs the Italian school of singing there need only be added a few words on the subject of enunciation and diction. Here the laws are again almost universal; but the rules for their application should be modified according to the language employed by the singer.

'Music,' as Garcia has said, 'though the language of the emotions, can only arouse them in a vague and general manner. To express any feeling or idea we must make use of words. Hence the importance for the singer of delivering these with the utmost distinctness, correctness, and meaning, under the penalty of losing the attention of the audience' (*Hints on Singing*, p. 45).

The mechanism of verbal utterance is the same in singing and in speaking. So far as the pronunciation of consonants is concerned, it must not be altered or varied, unless greater distinctness of articulation can be so obtained. For instance, what might be regarded as exaggeration in ordinary speech or drawing-room conversation seems perfectly natural in singing or stage elocution. I have generally found that, granted the vocal gift, the person who speaks well stands a better chance of making a good singer than the person who speaks badly.

The disparity between English and Italian as singing languages is greatly over-estimated and can always be overcome, although it seldom is. The advantage of the Italian lies chiefly in the more 'open' vowels—an advantage not to be despised, seeing that 'intonation, sustaining of the voice, expression or quality of timbre, tonic accent, and vocalization are all entrusted to the care of the vowel'.

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But when the openness, the amplitude, the freedom of the Italian vowels are reproduced in the formation of the equivalent English sounds, together with a similar forward projection of the resultant tone, the disparity should almost entirely disappear.

The true explanation why this does not always happen lies in the fundamental obstacles presented by English consonants, as they are pronounced with half-closed mouth and tightened jaw by the vast majority of people to whom the English language is the mother-tongue. With their fixed 'singing position', their rigid facial muscles, their inelastic joints, and their rebellious tongues, their common habit is to allow syllable after syllable to slither out half articulated. Thus vowels which might otherwise be admirable for singing are badly shaped, inadequate, and impure.

I have tested and proved this in hundreds of instances, on both sides of the Atlantic, proving it most decisively by the facility with which foreigners can be taught to surmount the difficulties of English pronunciation. With their superior method of vowel-formation and enunciation, they invariably learn to make themselves better understood in singing than their English-speaking colleagues.

As a medium for beauty of speech and vocal sound, the language of Shakespeare is not less favourable than any other tongue spoken upon the earth. Patti could sing with equally irresistible charm in English, French, Spanish, Russian, German, and Welsh.

My preference for Italian in the singing of Mozart is where he himself employed an Italian text for his compositions; and he employed it for most of his operas. He loved the language. Its softness, its sweetness, its poetic grace, its graphic force appealed to him; and he knew how to set it to music with the maximum of racial flavour and rhythmic feeling. The least the singer can strive to accomplish is to do Mozart justice by a clear, refined utterance of the words to which he allied his ineffable melodies.

Singers with beautiful voices and moderate executive ability do not sufficiently recognize the tremendous influence of diction on their art. As a rule they think too much about their tone. On the other hand, those possessing only fair voices often do wonders

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by delivering the poet's lines with some peculiar charm of style, with distinctness, intelligence, refinement, and the requisite sense of contrast. But the proper combination is rare.

The mechanism for clear, emphatic, or rapid articulation is granted by nature to 90 per cent. of well-bred people; yet probably not one-twentieth of that number is so trained as to display their valuable faculty to advantage in either speech or song. The neglect of the former in childhood, crudities of dialect, and a slipshod mode of speaking that have not been corrected soon enough, are common obstacles to the would-be vocalist, and are exceedingly hard to overcome.

The old Italian singers were adepts in the art of 'patter'. They could rattle off their words at a rate that was simply astounding, and so distinctly that the audience could understand every syllable, which was perhaps the sole excuse for treating dialogue in opera, as Mozart did, in the form of *recitativo secco*, which I confess to finding extremely dull, with its eternal accompaniment of chords scraped by the principal 'cello and double-bass. But the art of the *recitativo secco* made it easy for the singers to pronounce the words of their airs with ease and clarity. The one was regarded as a preparatory study for the other.

A most remarkable illustration of this was the famous baritone, Cotogni, who used to sing Figaro to Patti's Rosina at Covent Garden in Rossini's *Barbiere*. His delivery of the 'Largo al factotum' was as quick and lively as that of the present-day Titta Ruffo, and certainly more distinct; and in the recitative of the Figaro of *Le Nozze* his clear utterance was beyond reproach. Yet it is a fact of which all his friends were aware that Cotogni suffered from an impediment in his speech which in ordinary conversation was painfully evident. He did not stammer—people who stammer badly but do not hesitate when singing or reciting are not uncommon. He made a whistling sound with the sides of his tongue against his teeth that was worse than a lisp. The moment he began to sing it entirely disappeared.

In Mozart we find the need for a quality additional to good diction—the quality of drama. Other composers before him

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made, indeed, a similar demand; but Mozart in some manner asked for a greater union of rare gifts than any of them.

The all-round development of the many rare talents here referred to constitutes what we now regard as the *sine qua non* for the interpretation of the classical Lied and the higher type of modern song, wherein poem and music are supposed to be brought absolutely into line with each other. Mozart was among the earliest of the great musicians to equalize the importance of both elements.

It was not as a writer of Lieder that Mozart displayed this gift. None of his songs is worthy of discussion here except that masterpiece 'Das Veilchen', the model of the felicitous treatment of a simple theme that was followed by so many illustrious song-writers. I mention it not in order to show how it should be sung; the song itself shows that; but because it stands apart from everything else that Mozart wrote. Otto Jahn, his biographer, says of it:

> 'The crown of all the songs, by virtue of its touching expression of emotion and its charming perfection of form, is unquestionably Goethe's "Veilchen".
>
> 'In other songs we discern musical genius divining and bringing to light the poetic germ which lie hidden in the words; here we have the impression made upon Mozart by true poetry. It may seem remarkable that so simple a lyrical poem should have been treated by Mozart as a romance, giving a certain amount of dramatic detail to the little story; and yet it must not be overlooked that the masterly touch which repeats the closing words: "Das arme Veilchen! es war ein herzigs Veilchen!" fully reasserts a genuine lyric element. Goethe's clear and plastic presentation of a simple image, true in every feature, could not fail to impress him deeply.'

The singer who can do justice to 'Das Veilchen' probably owns most of the qualities required for the interpretation of the Lieder of Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, and even Wolf and Strauss.

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VII

TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION

MOZART wrote easily and rapidly but never carelessly. His tireless industry for thirty years resulted in a prodigious output, which prematurely sapped his vitality. But he never put on paper a note or a sign that he did not want to be observed. Grace and symmetry were as natural to him as to a Greek sculptor; and he was one of the greatest masters of musical form that ever lived.

We can scarcely realize how marvellously original he was. At the time he lived and wrote a large proportion of his melodies, his peculiar rhythms, his turns of phraseology and expression, his cadences—his individual mannerisms—were things that must have sounded absolutely new.

When I was studying an air from *Don Giovanni*, I once asked my master how I could best improve my phrasing of Mozart's music and my rendering of his ornaments.

'Go to the "Pops" every week,' said Garcia. 'Go to St. James's Hall and listen to Joachim and Piatti and Norman-Néruda. Make a turn or a shake or an *appoggiatura* as they do; make your *portamenti* as lightly, as delicately, and with as much reticence. The great violinists and 'cellists have preserved that art much better than the singers. You can learn from them everything that you want to know about it, and you may imitate them without fear.'

This was said over forty years ago, and it stands good to-day, even though the vocalist has always something to add to the instrumentalist's clarity.

A close study of Mozart's operas shows his amazing aptitude for colour, for an individual quality of dramatic expression, peculiar not only to each character, but to every thought or feeling of that character. This aptitude is the more astonishing because it is obviously spontaneous, not the result of long reflection or laborious effort.

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Observe, for instance, how in the two airs of the Countess in *Le Nozze di Figaro* 'Porgi amor' introduces the proud but neglected lady in a prayer for help to the god of love; while the first part of 'Dove sono' is rather an outpouring of vain regrets over a happy past that shows little promise of renewal. The music of each differs in character from the other; yet both are generally sung in the same monotonous key of misery and boredom, and with exactly the same vocal colouring.

The gramophone, had it been invented thirty years earlier, would provide evidence of Theresa Tietjens's reading of these two pieces, and prove how a great dramatic singer could infuse into each its full and individual qualities. Description cannot replace such evidence; but it may at least be said that, apart from her eloquent colouring of each utterance, Tietjens achieved not a little of her triumph by the purity and simplicity of her phrasing and the natural, unforced tragic grandeur of her style. To her the instinct for variation or contrast came without being sought, and it enabled her to realize Mozart's exact intention.

The same may be said of Patti's delicate differentiation between the two airs of Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*, which she made partly by instinct and partly because she had been trained in the right tradition.[1] Her singing of 'Batti, batti' was always marked by a mixture of coquetry and flattery obviously meant to coax Masetto into forgiving her for her flirtation with the amorous

[1] Adelina Patti is often belittled because of certain breaches of artistic taste that occasionally disfigured her concert career after she had left the stage. The younger generation who never heard her in opera could only judge her by what she did on her periodical appearances at the Albert Hall for twenty years with the *beaux restes* of a marvellously-preserved voice. At Covent Garden between 1861 and 1885 she had, at any rate as Zerlina, done something more than warble Mozart's tunes; she had established her fame as a genuine Mozart singer. One reason for this was, that she had studied the rôle with her brother-in-law, impresario, and 'coach', Maurice Strakosch, who previously acted for some time as accompanist for the great Pasta when she was teaching at Como. There Strakosch learned the tradition of the part of Zerlina from one who had sung Mozart in London less than twenty-five years after the composer's death. The tradition was therefore direct and (in the opinion of Garcia) correct.

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Don. Zerlina knows, of course, that her simple sweetheart would never raise a finger to hurt her, but she offers to submit to corporal punishment all the same. On the other hand, in 'Vedrai, carino' one could instantly perceive, when Patti sang it, the tone of unaffected regret and anxious sympathy aroused by Masetto's physical suffering, even with the undercurrent of humour that accompanies the air.

Apart from tradition, however, the composer's intention was clearly conveyed by the nature of the vocal treatment revealed in these two airs. In 'Batti, batti' the repeated downward trend of the quavers plainly suggests a sort of caressing, insinuating motion, which the singer must render with an unbroken surface of legato, yet with scarcely a shade of portamento anywhere. This restraint imparts the greater effect to the delicate gliding of the *notes coulées* on the phrase 'E le care tue manine'.

In 'Vedrai, carino' there is more scope for an expressive portamento, very lightly graded on the slurred quavers; and no less important is a neat execution of the mordent on the word *carino*, which gives the cue, as it were, for Zerlina's attitude of real solicitude this time. As a musical indication of her *certo balsamo*, that run of three notes is a stroke of genius; and so, too, are the three taps when she places her hand upon her heart and slyly says, *Sentilo battere*.

Although portamenti as a rule are to be lightly sung, that is, when uttering 'moderate or tender sentiments', they must, when 'applied to expression of powerful feelings, be strong and rapid' (*Hints on Singing*, p. 63). Examples of the latter are frequently to be met with in Mozart, especially in *Don Giovanni*, where he uses the portamento again and again as a means for dramatic expression and indicates it (as in the opening phrase of the Don's serenade) in a manner that cannot be mistaken. The mastery of this vocal grace is essential and of the highest value to the dramatic singer.

The music of Donna Anna and Don Ottavio contains many similar instances—the former in 'Non mi dir', the latter in both his solo airs, notwithstanding the extraordinary contrast that they

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otherwise present. In 'Dalla sua pace' the word *morte*, sung without a strong portamento from the D to the G, would be ineffective; while in 'Il mio tesoro', which is as florid and declamatory as the other air is lyrical, there are similar points to be observed.

So again, in the part of Donna Elvira, Mozart has employed the same mode of heightening emotional fervour in music that is otherwise quite different in cast, like, for example, the opening of the trio 'Ah, chi mi dice mai' and the very difficult aria, 'Mi tradì alma ingrata'. The explanation of the disparity in Donna Elvira's case is, curiously enough, identical with that in Don Ottavio's, namely, that the two pieces were not written for the same artists. 'Dalla sua pace' was composed for a Viennese tenor, Signor Morello, who found 'Il mio tesoro' too much for him; whilst 'Mi tradì' was introduced into the opera for the famous Madame Cavalieri because there was not a show-piece brilliant enough for her liking.

Yet 'Mi tradì' is not difficult on account of its brilliancy. It has nothing in common with the vengeful outbursts of the Queen of Night. The strange mixture of contradictory feelings that besets Donna Elvira finds expression here in one long series of *notes coulées*, extremely difficult to sing with neatness and at the same time the right dramatic accent. The question has been asked why Mozart set the air in this manner. It was either because he wished to illustrate Donna Elvira's unbalanced, hesitant condition of mind (she was supposed to be a *ci-devant* nun, whose troubles had upset her mentally), or because Mme Cavalieri was an uncommonly good executant of Mozart's favourite *notes coulées*.

I once heard Christine Nilsson in this rôle (Tietjens being the Donna Anna and Trebelli the Zerlina); and although I saw many good Elviras subsequently, I never again experienced the same realization of the unfortunate lady's state of mental distraction or the same rare beauty of voice and method in performing the 'ups and downs' of 'Mi tradì'. It reminded me of the exquisite bowing of Sarasate. Even if the gift came to her by intuition, how hard she must have practised at first!

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VIII

THE TREATMENT OF RECITATIVE

THE chronicles of opera in the eighteenth century show how much the composers owed to their stage interpreters. They had to provide tasks worthy of artists who possessed voices of incredible range, beauty, and flexibility—great singers who were likewise great actors and actresses, and not their least amazing gift was their capacity for declaiming the magnificent vocal and dramatic passages which carried on the stage action even more than the airs, the ensembles, and the choruses.

Those passages were embodied in dramatic *Recitative*, not the rapid *parlando* of the *recitativo secco*, which was merely a hurried explanatory dialogue, but the recitative on the grand scale, accompanied by the orchestra, the secret of which was no less natural to Mozart than was the method of delivering it to his interpreters. Unfortunately the gift of the master and the art of the singers have alike disappeared. In opera, though not in oratorio, this form of dramatic recitative has been superseded; but nothing has ever surpassed it for energy, spirit, or power. It remains to this day the perfect model for all that vocal declamation can achieve.

Among the most extraordinary singers of Mozart's time was the capricious Aloysia Weber, with whom he fell in love. He never married her, but took her younger sister, Constanze, to be his devoted and famous wife. Aloysia, however, sang in many of his operas, and it was for her that he wrote some of his most exacting pieces.

Among these was a 'grand' aria', composed in 1779, which was a setting of the recitative and air that Alceste sings on her first entry in Gluck's opera. It might have been regarded as a kind of challenge to the older master, whom, notwithstanding, Mozart knew and respected. It was a tremendous *bravura* piece bristling

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with difficulties and *tours de force* of every description—with a compass extending to G in *alt*—such as Aloysia Weber alone could have done justice to.

The recitative was in its way a masterpiece. Nothing to equal it had ever been heard before. This is what Otto Jahn says about it:

> 'But the importance of this song does not depend alone on the brilliancy of its passages. . . . The recitative, undeniably the most important section of the composition, is second to none of Mozart's later recitatives in depth and truth of expression and noble beauty, and richly provided with unexpected harmonic changes . . . if this carefully and minutely-elaborated recitative be compared with Gluck's simple *secco* recitative there can be no doubt that Mozart's is far superior both in fertility of invention and marked characterization.'

Aloysia, we are told, did justice both to the recitative and the aria; and in order to do this she must have been equally marvellous as a dramatic and a coloratura singer; and let me add that since Ilma di Murska no soprano within living memory has quite answered to that description.

In her dual capacity lies the encouragement to the singer.[1] Aloysia Weber was not the possessor of a powerful or even a robust organ. Jahn says 'the powerful rendering of violent and fiery passion was not her forte. A certain moderation seems to have been peculiar to her, which Mozart turned to account as an element of artistic harmony.' Another writer says that 'she performed marvels with her delicate throat, and her voice resembled a Cremona violin'. Yet she could declaim recitative magnificently! So much can a singer with a 'delicate throat' accomplish by means of genius, industry, and determination; and I believe Aloysia Weber must have had all three.

The singing of Mozart's recitatives calls for qualities far beyond the merely vocal. They require, to begin with, first-rate elocu-

[1] She took the part of Donna Anna on the first production of *Don Giovanni* in Vienna, May 7, 1788, when the opera was regarded as a failure.

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tion, a freedom of balance and accent akin to that needed for the delivery of blank verse. The time not being strict, the notes are to be regarded as no more than an indication of the approximate length and weight of utterance to be accorded to the syllables. Yet every sentence must have its proper rhythmical swing and the sense conveyed by due emphasis and expression on every word and tone. The pauses, the silences are all eloquent; and the use of the *messa di voce* on a held note must contribute something real to the sentiment of the passage. Contrasts or sudden changes of feeling must be depicted by the colour of the voice no less than by the mode of delivery.

In that wonderful recitative, 'O quali eccessi', which precedes 'Mi tradì', a rapid transition has to be effected. Donna Elvira, in less than half a dozen bars, passes from a climax of rage to a flood of tender self-pity, followed by the feeling that her love is not yet dead.

There are numbers of recitatives in Mozart's operas calling for similar qualities and depicting every imaginable *nuance* of human emotion. They must all be treated in similar fashion—i.e. conceived in the right dramatic spirit, attacked with vigour, correctly accentuated, enunciated and declaimed with clearness, and sung without superfluous portamento or a vestige of vocal trickery.

A score that well repays study for this purpose is that of *Idomeneo* (produced at Munich in 1781), an opera which unfortunately is never heard in England. It was Mozart's first *opera seria* and marked the starting-point of his career as a dramatic composer. The treatment of the recitative in *Idomeneo* is in many respects quite original, and not less masterful than that of the orchestra. The opera is best known for the charming soprano air, 'Zeffiretti lusinghieri'; but another feature is its anticipation of the 'supernatural' effects in *Don Giovanni*, which was not produced until seven years later.

Mozart's versatility in writing recitative, as in everything else, was astounding. He could express every emotion and could even caricature his own serious style with a result that was genuinely comic. A notable instance of this occurs in *Così fan tutte*, when

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Isadora (Fiordiligi) pretends to be furiously angry with the fickle lovers for breaking their plighted vows. Her manner in 'Come un scoglio' is that of a tragedy-queen, and in delivering her invective she skips over some tremendous intervals; but the whole number is obviously a clever parody of the real thing.

However, whether the sentiment be real or artificial, the art of the singer must be equally great. For clean attack, impeccable intonation, pure, neat phrasing, ample sonority, and strong accentuation must mark the declamation of every sentence.

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IX

THE APPOGGIATURA

The appoggiatura has been much discussed and at times has led to more heated argument than it demanded. The rules pertaining to it were laid down (or gradually laid themselves down) on perfectly clear lines, and have only to be understood for mistakes or misinterpretations to be avoided. For these rules I have, where possible, found it better to consult tradition rather than text-books—excepting of course in the case of Garcia, who put the one into the other.

The *appoggiatura* dates back to the now remote period when composers left the choice of ornaments and graces to the artists who sang their music. It was a stupid fashion, but doubtless there were good reasons for it, until, over a century ago, Rossini gave it up on the sensible ground that he found himself better served by supplying his own ornaments.

But in music of a date earlier than Rossini's one has still to deal with the old custom that gives a loophole for wrong treatment to the ignorant, the ill-informed, or the bigoted; or to those who imagine that every note written by the old masters, in recitative or elsewhere, should be literally sung as it appears on the printed page; who imagine that because Bach does not require—nor should he indeed receive—the usual Italian interpretation of the appoggiatura, the same strict law must perforce apply to Mozart.

The master's obvious conclusion, according to Garcia, was that the appoggiatura 'must be introduced'. That is to say, 'when a sentence ends with two equal notes, in the Italian style, we raise the first a tone or a half-tone, according to the degree of the scale'. And he adds, 'the exception to this rule is when the two notes are both an essential part of an idea, when they belong

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to concerted voices, or when the harmony does not permit the alteration' (*Hints on Singing*, p. 67).

These exceptions have to be very carefully considered; but in the majority of cases their treatment has been made familiar by tradition. They rarely occur in recitative, where the intention is generally too plain to leave room for misconstruction. The need for the heightened accent afforded by raising the first note seems unmistakable. In the three sentences with which Susanna begins the recitative 'Giunse alfin', preceding 'Deh vieni', a literal rendering of the same notes on the penultimate syllables of *momento*, *affanno*, and *mio* would sound bald, ugly, unlike Mozart, although he wrote them so. In the aria greater latitude is possible; but it should not be left to the teacher or singer of no special knowledge to decide where the two notes are or are not 'an essential part of an idea', or where the appoggiatura is calculated to spoil the harmony.

There is another point—the *length* of the raised note. Should it be permissible to alter it? In my opinion, certainly not. When Mozart wrote a crotchet he did not mean it to be sung as a quaver. Susannas like Marimon and Sembrich did not depart from tradition in one regard, nor did they wilfully disobey it in another. Thus, in 'Deh vieni' they naturally sang the appoggiatura where it does and should occur, namely, on the last two notes of the first and fourth phrases, on *bella* and *tace*; also again on *l'aura* and *adesca*. But I never heard them convert the crotchet-quaver of these two syllables into two quavers, as the late Mr. Randegger gave them in his Novello edition of the arias of Susanna and Cherubino.

In concerted music the appoggiatura must *not* be introduced, above all where the voices are singing together. It brings in a note foreign to the chord and creates an effect that the composer did not intend. If Mozart wished for an appoggiatura in one of the themes of an ensemble he never failed to indicate it in the orthodox way by a small note (to be accorded the same value as a large one). Examples of this occur in the duet 'La ci darem' (*Don Giovanni*), where Zerlina has twice to glide down a whole

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fifth on *Mi trema un poco il cor.* But it would not justify her in raising the last note but one, as many a Zerlina has done, on the subsequent word *Masetto.*

Similarly with the two duets in *Le Nozze*: Susanna must sing the word *boschetto* in 'Sull' aria' without the appoggiatura, although the Countess sings it with one; the text of the music clearly indicates this in each case. In 'Crudel, perchè' the Count should never alter the C sharp on *verrai* and *mancherai*, since obviously the composer has never asked or meant him to do so. But I admit that every famous singer I have heard in the part has sinned by transgressing this rule, probably because it sounds rather prettier.

Here, for once, authoritative tradition exemplifies the fact that recognized laws may be broken by the people who as a rule accord them the most implicit obedience. But on the whole I prefer a sound, definite law to a doubtful tradition, however widely accepted.

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X

MARKS OF EXPRESSION, BREATHING-PLACES, ETC.

In teaching I have found it convenient to make use of modern editions of Mozart's operatic airs because they are well printed and have fewer misprints than the old sheet-music copies published years ago. Many of the indications and substituted notes are correct and some of the marks of expression permissible; those which are not one can always change.

But therein lies the danger. These 'edited' versions are too untrustworthy to be followed without question. The student should carefully think out the doubtful points and reject without hesitation all changes or embellishments which seem out of keeping with the true characteristics of the Mozart style of which I have endeavoured to indicate the salient features. For his own marks of expression—*p* or *f*; *cres.* or *dim.*; the acceleration or slackening of *tempo*; pauses, and so forth—it is necessary to look to the accompaniment even more than the voice part, for there they are mostly to be found.

It was not the custom of the day to indicate *breathing-places* otherwise than by rests, and then only in the rarest cases, except in recitative, where the natural accentuation and rounding-off of the phrase, as in ordinary spoken declamation, provided obvious opportunities. The latter were intended not so much to indicate silence as to serve the purpose of punctuation.

In the solos and concerted pieces the musical phrase dictates the best place for taking breath as well if not better than the text. The charm and symmetry of the musical effect needs to be the first consideration in the rendering of all Mozart's melodies, and the singer may, in this particular matter of phrasing, be as accurately guided by good taste and right feeling as by the most reliable tradition. On the other hand, I do not agree, where faulty English translations are the cause, with new breathing-

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places that upset the melody for the sake of badly-fitting sentences. The words are important, but in Mozart it must be the music, first and last.

Beyond a doubt Mozart wrote for singers who had a prodigious breathing capacity, as did Bach and Handel before him; but only now and then did he call upon them to sing passages which we should to-day find impossible of execution in a single breath. There is no virtue in accomplishing these *tours de force* when the passage can be so much better sung with the aid of an extra breath, taken imperceptibly at the right moment and in the right way.

It is a serious question whether many of the trying passages, based upon a single syllable, that are so familiar to Mozart students, were invariably sung a hundred years ago in a single respiration. Manuel Garcia never expected it, for example, in the extended run that occurs in 'Il mio tesoro', but at once marked the conventional breaths—the same that I heard Caruso take on the solitary occasion when he sang Don Ottavio at Covent Garden. Nor did the old teacher act differently in other cases, such as the long runs in 'Gli angui d'inferno', 'Ah, lo so', 'Non mi dir', 'Zeffiretti lusinghieri', &c.

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XI

UNION OF GRACE AND SKILL

Grace of execution must distinguish the rendering of Mozart's *ornaments*. These *gruppetti* or turns, these quick *appoggiature* and *acciaccature* (' two rapid descending notes ornamenting a third note '), these repeated or staccato sounds, and, perhaps most important of all, the perfect shake or trill, must be at the command of the thoroughly-trained vocalist.

But to mechanical accuracy must also be added two things— entire ease of manner and constant unfailing obedience to the rhythmical accent of the bar.

In Mozart there is never occasion either to hurry or to drag the ' grace ' notes. The ornament, whatever it may be, always has its precise place in the theme or phrase, and, if properly executed, there is always abundant time for singing it with smoothness, clarity, and distinction. Yet how seldom do we hear this done, especially where the *turn* is concerned. A violinist will take pains to make you hear the last note of the turn ; a singer will trouble less about it. Above all, every note of every ornament must be as perfectly in tune as the theme which it embellishes.

It is almost a crime to add to or take away from the literal text of Mozart's ornaments. They suffice as they stand. The great Italian singers used occasionally to insert a turn or a mordent after a pause on a long ending note. Mario did so in ' Il mio tesoro ' on the words *a vendicar io vado* ; Patti sometimes on the *dove mi stà* in ' Vedrai, carino '. But these were among the later traditions not so strictly to be imitated. Mozart is best left alone.

Pasta invented more changes and additional ornaments than any other *coloratura* soprano of her time. But she reserved them exclusively for Bellini, who wrote *Norma* and *Sonnambula* for her ;

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for Donizetti, who adored her Anna Bolena; and for Rossini, who thought her the ideal Semiramide. She never altered or added a note to Mozart. There the singer declared herself 'on holy ground'.

The *cadenza*, again, was a growth of the nineteenth century. It is out of place in Mozart's vocal compositions because the scheme of his design is complete without it; besides, when he wishes, they contain quite sufficient elaborate passages for display to serve the ambition of any average good singer. The cadenza belongs, properly speaking, to the school of the Italian composers above named, and to Verdi or Meyerbeer.

. . . .

I have now, I think, enumerated all the principal points involved in the application of Italian singing to the music of Mozart. The perfect union of the two is the goal that the student should have in mind from the start; and the conscientious labour required for its accomplishment can hardly fail to be rewarded, since the key to the 'Bel Canto' unlocks in Mozart the richest storehouse of vocal treasures that musician ever gave to the world.

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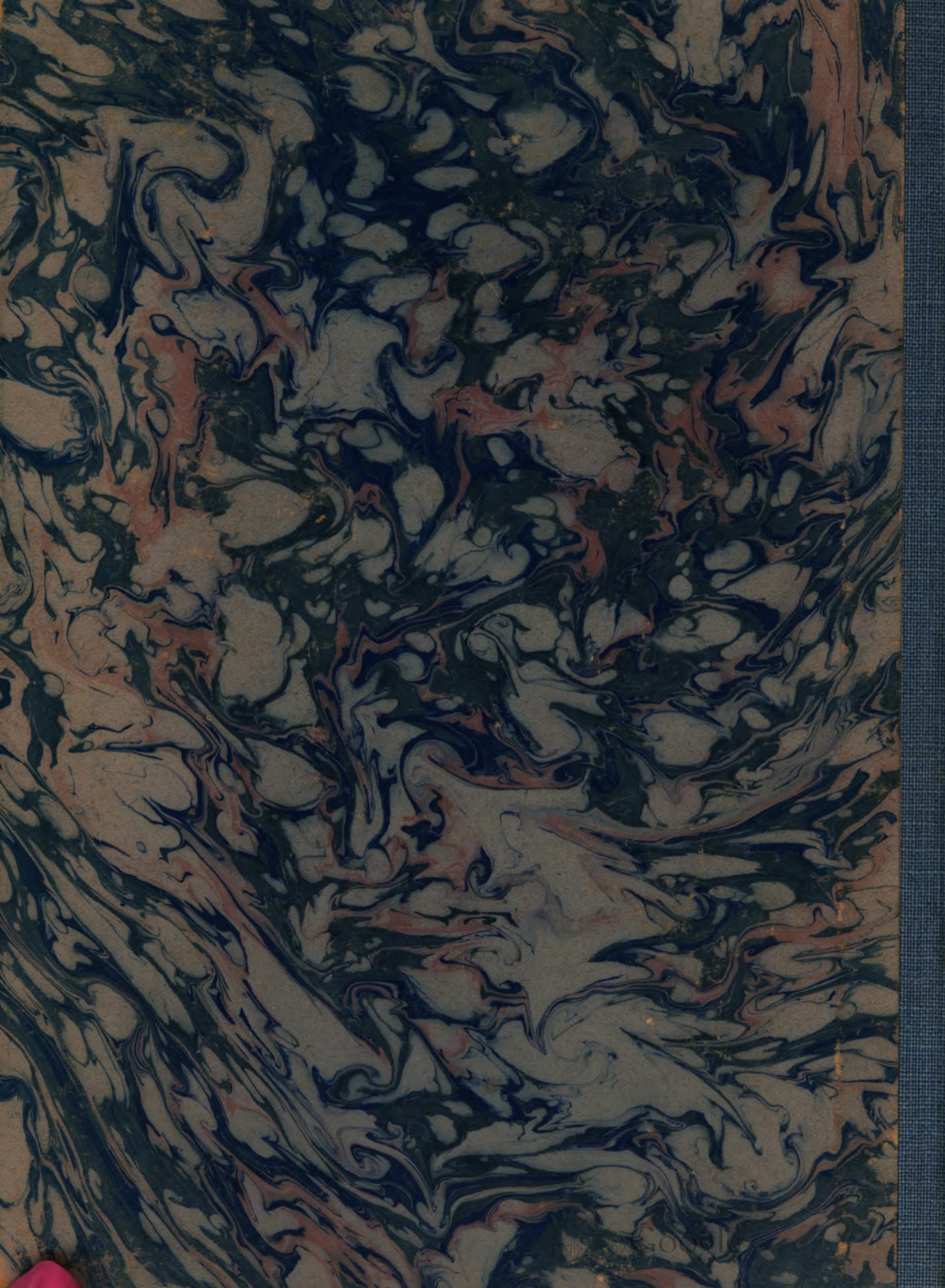
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